

Meri-Ka-chak — His Message



THIS is one of a series of booklets for the use of study groups formed for the purpose of discussing problems of interest to the rural people of Manitoba.

Other booklets in the series have been prepared under the direction of a committee appointed by the Minister of Agriculture for the Province; and include the following subjects: Why Organize Co-operation? Credit Union, Wheat Study, Homemaking, Foods and Health, Public Speaking, Wheat Study, Soil Conservation, Rural Community Health, Recreation and a Guide for Discussion Group Leaders.

Some of these booklets are issued in French as well as English. This material is designed for the use of small groups, preferably from five to ten persons meeting regularly for the systematic study of the subjects chosen; and copies will be supplied free to all members of such groups.



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STUDY GROUP COMMITTEE
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Kay J. Russenholt

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IT IS TOLD: Away in the north, far beyond the land of the Strong Woods Indians, beyond the Great River which carries the Dancing Lakes down to the Big Sea Water, there lives a wonderful tribe.

There, where the sweep of forest o'er hill and dale has never echoed to the foot-fall of the Paleface, where the birds and beavers of the Dancing Lakes have never been disturbed by the clatter of his machines, this people has lived for generations.

All the secrets of the woods and lakes and rivers are known to the boys and girls who, through summers and winters of adventure, grow to happy men and women. So well know they the simple secret of working together that they are called by name the Shan-a-macs (the People who Pull Together, like the voyageurs in their great canoes).

Here, as he would have it told, begins the Message of their great chieftain Meri-ka-chak (the Friend of All Men), to our own boys and girls.



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Edited and illustrated by
E. S. RUSSENHOLT

Meri-ka-chak *His Message*





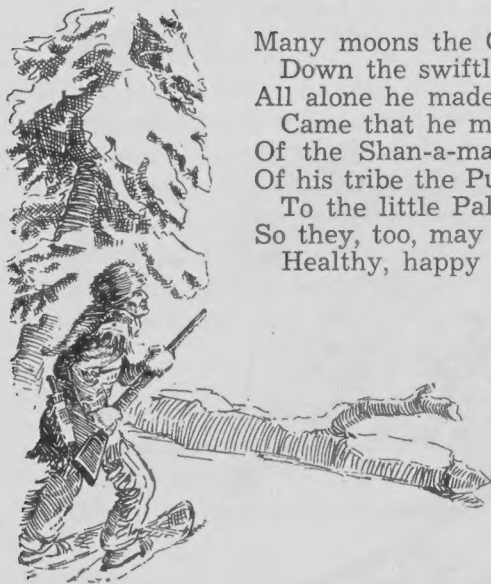
The Chieftain

Gaze upon the kindly chieftain
 Meri-ka-chak, Friend-of-All-Men,
 Who from out the distant Northlands
 Comes to bring a message to you.



Very wise is Meri-ka-chak
 Without rival as a hunter—
 None so cunning as a trapper
 As the great chief Meri-ka-chak,
 He whose name means Friend-of-All-
 Men.

For since childhood he has studied
 All the habits of the Wild Ones;
 Knows the animals and fishes
 Knows the birds, their songs and
 plumage.



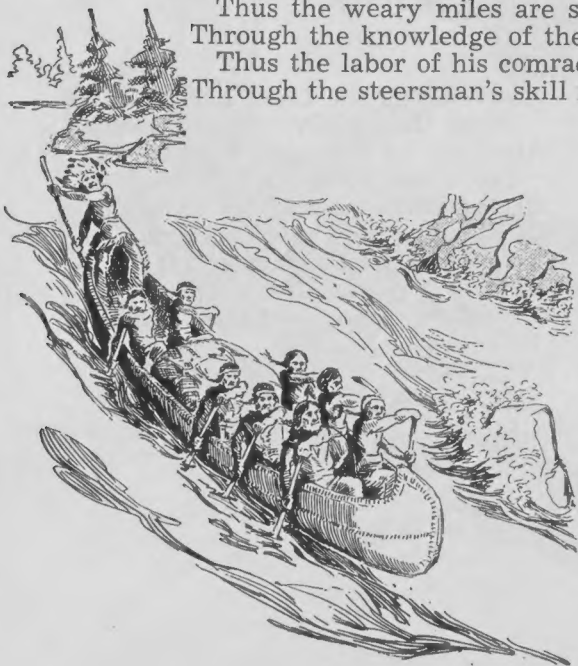
Many moons the Chief has travelled
 Down the swiftly running waters.
 All alone he made the journey—
 Came that he might tell the story
 Of the Shan-a-macs, his kinsmen,
 Of his tribe the Pull-Togethers
 To the little Paleface children;
 So they, too, may live together
 Healthy, happy and contented.

Listen, little Paleface children
To the words of Meri-ka-chak:

Often down our Northern rivers
I have journeyed with my comrades,
Eight or ten of us together
In our long canoe of cedar.

At the stern the steersman seated
Very skilful with his paddle,
Well he knows the course to follow.
Long ago on former journeys
He has noted down the land-marks,
Some lone pine tree, high uprising,
On some rock of strange formation.

Thus the weary miles are shortened
Through the knowledge of the steersman;
Thus the labor of his comrades
Through the steersman's skill is lightened.



He it is who gives the signal
For the start when dawn is breaking.
He it is who in the evening
Settles on the place for camping.
Very welcome is the signal
That the long day's toil is over.
On an island, wooded, sheltered,
Soon the great canoe is resting.
From it food and robes are carried,
Wood is gathered for the fire
And the teepees rise like magic.
Every brave alert and busy
Working cheerfully together.



Yet, with all his skill and wisdom,
Little could he do unaided
When the rapids must be traversed,
When the treacherous whirlpools threaten.
Then above the roaring waters
High and clear his voice is lifted
Shouting, "All together, comrades!"
Dripping, gleaming in the sunlight,
Every paddle is uplifted.
Downward in the foaming current
As one blade they cleave the water!

So we overcome the perils
Of the whirlpools and the rapids.
Thus by striving all together
Is our journey made in safety!

Often in the summer evenings
I have wandered with my children,
Smiling Face and Little Rabbit,
Down the trails across the prairies.
As we walked they asked me questions
Of the animals and insects
And the birds that flew above us.

"Will you show us," they would ask me,
"Where the plover's nest is hidden?"
Or, perhaps, as high above us
Some great hawk would wheel and circle,
"Give his call, and bring him nearer,"
They would beg me as they watched him.
So to please them I would whistle,
I would give a call that brought him
Swooping down from where he circled
Till he hovered just above us.

Once we halted by an ant-hill;
Watch, said I to Little Rabbit,
How they all help one another.
Very small indeed the ant is,
Little can it do unaided.
But their strength lies in their numbers,
Thousands working all together.

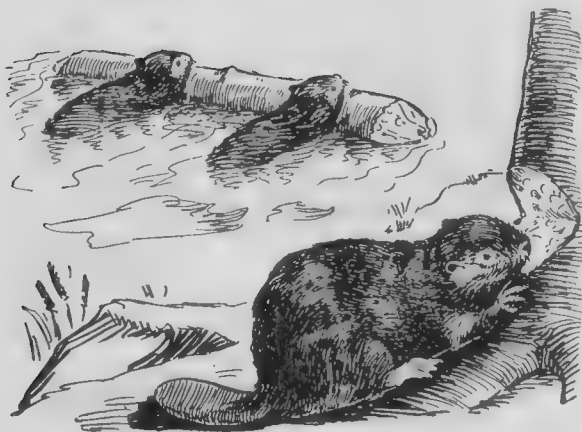
Thus it was they built this ant-hill,
Tall as you are, Little Rabbit.
In it there are many tunnels
Leading to the different chambers;
Some in which they store provisions,
Others which they use as nurseries.
And their duties are divided—
Some are warriors and hunters
Others never leave the ant-hill;
There they work, or feed the young ones,
Or keep guard against invaders.

But no matter what their duties
Each one faithfully performs it;
Thus the welfare of the ant-hill
Comes from working all together.



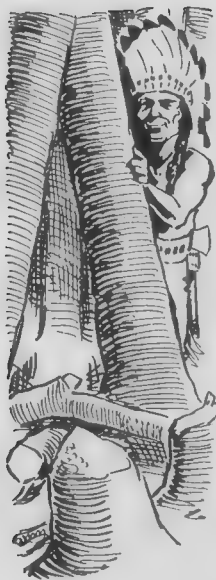
Often, as the darkness gathered
Have I stolen to the river,
And by moonlight watched the beavers
Working busily together.
I have seen them stem the current
With a dam of branches woven;
Filling up the cracks and niches,
Using mud and moss to fill them.

Sometimes I have forced a passage—
Through their dam have thrust my
paddle—
Then have hidden in the bushes
So that I might see them mend it.
'Twas not long before the beavers
Noted that their dam was broken,
And at once began to mend it;
Each one bringing twigs and branches.
Thus, by working all together
Soon they had repaired the damage.



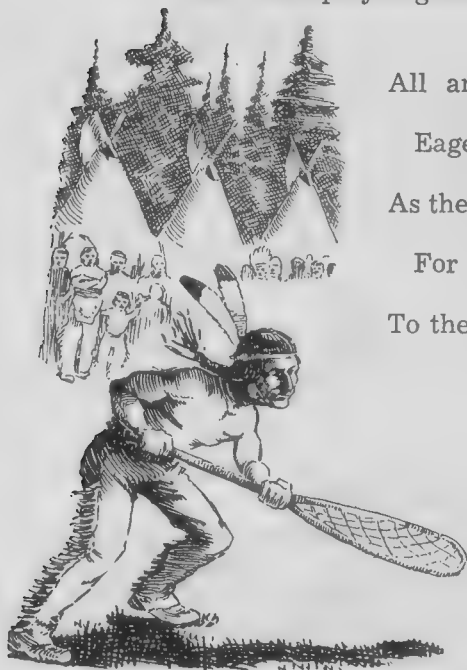
Sometimes in a lodge of beavers
One there is who shirks his labors.
One who will not help the others.
As they fell and drag the timber.

Very soon his comrades notice;
He from out the lodge is driven
Never more to dwell amongst them!
For amongst the busy beavers
Only those who work are welcome.



Never need Ah-meek, the beaver
Suffer hunger in the winter,
For, while yet the streams are flowing
Long before the river freezes,
Ah-meek stores enough to keep him
And his family from famine.
They are wise, the busy beavers
Working for the common welfare,
Storing up against the future.

In the Autumn when the harvest
By the squaws is reaped and gathered,
Comes a time of sport and feasting;
Then the young braves strive together,
Race and wrestle with each other,
Test their skill with bow and arrow.
But the chief of all their pastimes
Is Lacrosse, for so the Paleface
Names our game of Big-ga-pa-way.
Dearly do our young men love it.
Teams they form to play each other
Called by different names, the Panthers,
Beavers, Buffalo or Foxes,
Each team plays against the other.



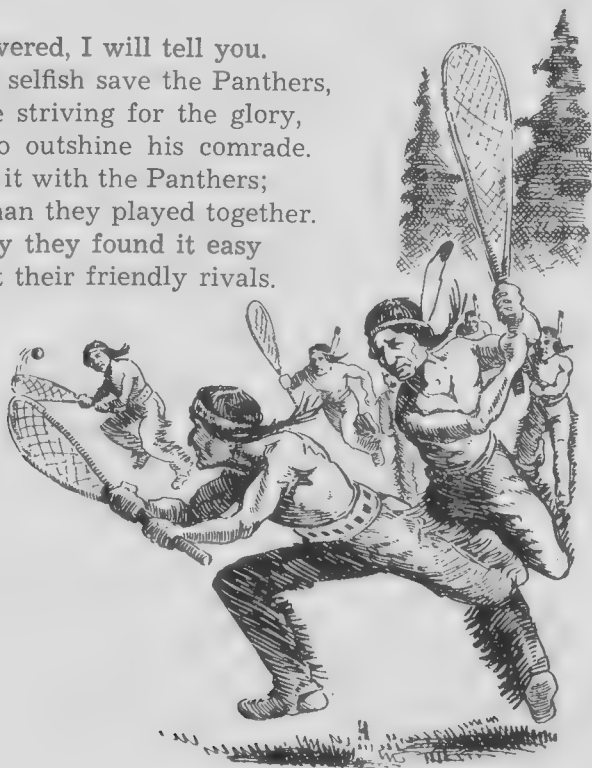
All around the tribe is
gathered,
Eagerly they watch the
struggle,
As the young braves strive
together
For the prizes that are
offered
To the team that wins the
contest.

I remember how the Panthers
Won with ease against the others.
Though the Antelopes were swifter,
Though the Buffalo were stronger.

Afterwards a warrior asked me,
"Can you tell, my Chief, the reason
Why the Panthers, though the youngest,
Won the prize against all others!"

Yes, I answered, I will tell you.

All were selfish save the Panthers,
Each brave striving for the glory,
Trying to outshine his comrade.
Not so was it with the Panthers;
As one man they played together.
That is why they found it easy
To defeat their friendly rivals.



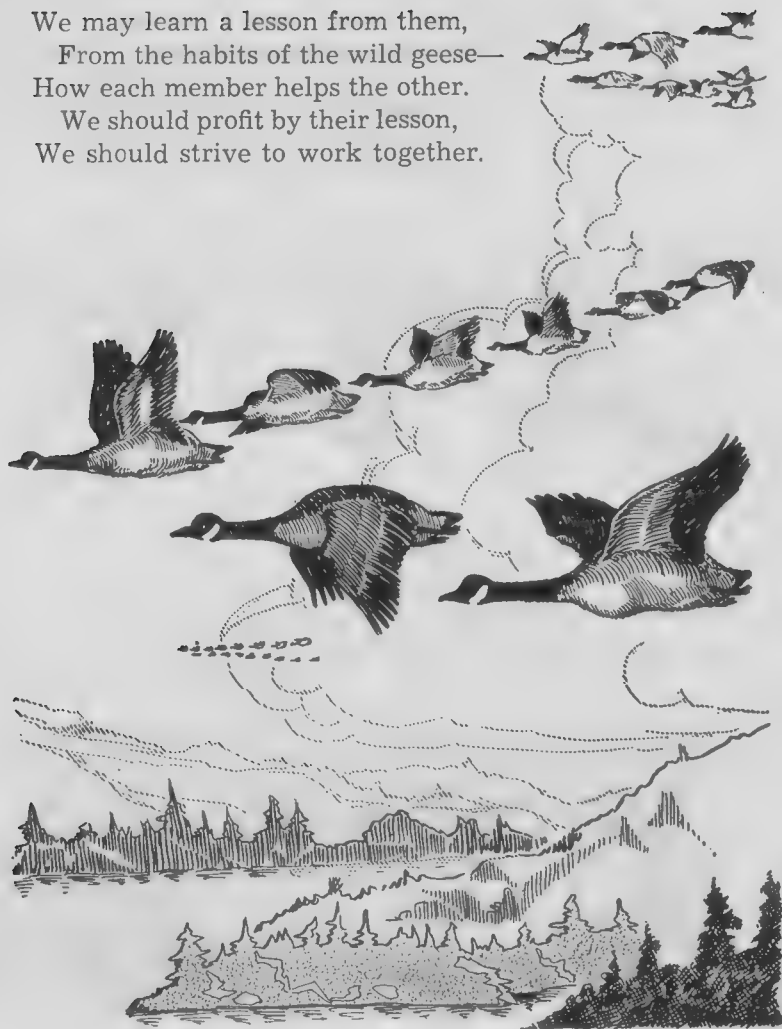
Have you noted, Paleface children,
How the wild geese, flying over,
Cleave the air in "V" formation,
Like a spear-head or an arrow?
At their head the strongest fliers,
And, when these at length grow
weary,
Others take their turn in leading.

Thus the stronger help the weaker
As they make the long, long journey
North in springtime, south in winter.
Have you noticed, how when feeding
In the stubble fields in autumn,
Always one on guard is posted
At a distance from the others,
So that if a foe approaches
He may warn his feathered comrades?

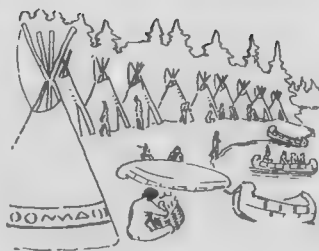
Little chance the wily coyote
Has to steal upon them feeding—
Loud a warning note is sounded,
Instantly the flock uprises!
Strong wings beating all together,
Up they soar with strident clamor.

We may learn a lesson from them,
From the habits of the wild geese—
How each member helps the other.

We should profit by their lesson,
We should strive to work together.



Listen, children, to the story
 Of the Shan-a-macs, my
 tribesmen,
 In your tongue named Pull-
 Togethers.
 Long ago they lived con-
 tented
 By the lake called Great Sea
 Water.



Very close they held together,
 There were none who dared attack them;
 They were strong because united.
 Till, one day, the wicked Nah-min,
 Nephew of their good chief Wemo,



Stirred up strife against his uncle,
 Envying his wealth and power.
 Very treacherous was Nah-min,
 Cunning as the wily coyote.
 And he gathered round about him
 Others like him—lazy, greedy.

But their plotting was discovered
 And when all the tribe was gathered
 Round the camp fire, at the Council
 Wemo rose and told the story
 Of the treachery of Nah-min,
 And the braves who plotted with him.
 "Kill them!" cried the friends of Wemo;
 "Comrades, to me!" shouted Nah-min.
 Bows were bent and war-clubs lifted;
 But the good chief stepped between them—

"Peace, my children," Wemo ordered,
 "Let no blood be shed, but rather
 Let us banish them forever—
 They shall leave our tribe forever."
 Thus was Nah-min and his comrades
 Driven forth 'midst hoots and hisses.



Very wroth was cunning Nah-min.
To the Iroquois he journeyed;
And, with lying tongue, he told them
Wemo's tribe was on the warpath
And had sworn to march against them.
"Do not wait," he told their chieftain,
"Till you hear ther warwhoop ringing;
Arm your warriors and smite them,
Take them by surprise and slay them."

Through the forest trails that evening
Sped the Iroquois in war paint;
And next morning, just at daybreak,
While the Shan-a-macs still slumbered,
Suddenly the warwhoop sounded!
'Twas the Iroquois attacking—
Taken by surprise, outnumbered,
Bravely fought the Pull-Togethers —
Even drove their foemen backwards
To the shelter of the forest.
In the breathing spell that followed
Wemo called his brother to him.
"Brother," said he, "For the moment,
We have won, but it is hopeless.
Soon the Iroquois will rally.
We must save the little children
And their mothers from the war club—
From the tomahawk and arrow.
Choose from those who are not wounded,
Twenty warriors to help you;
And, though certain death awaits you
Hold them off, until the women
And our little ones and wounded
In the war canoes are resting—
Down the current swift are speeding!"



Still our tribe the Pull-Togethers
Tell the story of that struggle,
How that little band of heroes
Fought until not one was standing—
Died, in order that their loved ones
Might escape from death and torture.

“Northward paddle,” Wemo ordered.
Many a weary mile they travelled
Till they reached a land of plenty
Where no man before had settled.
There in peace they lived together.
There they learned from ant and wild goose,
From the buffalo, and beaver,
How the Wild Ones helped each other—
Taught the lesson to their children.

So this message now I bring you
From my tribe the Pull-Togethers;
From the Shan-a-macs, my kinsmen—
*Joined together, none can harm you;
Little can you do, divided!*



In our tribe there dwell two brothers,
Wolverine and Flying Eagle.
Very mighty hunters are they,
Skilled in fishing and in trapping.

Once, when in the woods together
Wolverine cried, "See, my brother,
See the tracks that lie before us!"
"Bear tracks," Flying Eagle answered,
"'Tis a cinnamon or grizzly
From his winter sleep awakened."

Slowly, warily they followed.

Well they knew that in the springtime
Very savage was the grizzly,

Lean and hungry from his fasting.
Silently they tracked the foot prints

Till they reached a gloomy cavern
That had served the bear as shelter,
Where all winter he had slumbered.

As they peered into the shadows
Something stirred within the cavern,
And a sullen growl like thunder

Warned them that the bear was charging.

As he burst into the sunlight

Both their bowstrings twanged together,
And two arrows hummed like hornets—
Quivered in the monster's body.

With a roar of pain and anger
Swift the bear whirled on the brothers.

Wolverine stood nearest to him,
'Twas at him the bear charged madly.

Unafraid the hunter waited
With his tomahawk uplifted—

As the bear reared up to smite him



Downward flashed the keen-edged weapon,
While the warrior, leaping sideways,
Skilfully the charge evaded.

How the combat would have ended
Had there been one hunter only
None can tell, so huge the bear war.
But next moment it was finished!

Flying Eagle, like a panther
Leapt, his warclub smote the grizzly,
Like a thunderbolt descended,
And the bear crashed forward, lifeless!

Thus it was that Flying Eagle
And the Wolverine, his brother,
Won their fame as mighty hunters—
Thus it was they helped each other.



Listen to a story, children,
That is told our small papooses—
How the mighty hunter Keewis,
Once, when tracking in the forest,
Heard a voice amongst the bushes—
(Such a little voice) that called him,
Crying, "Help me, Keewis, help me."
'Twas a tiny forest fairy
In a spider's web entangled—
Who, in spite of all her struggles,
Could not break the threads that bound her.

Very gentle, Keewis freed her,
Smiled, and whispered to her softly.
"Fly away, my little sister
To your home amongst the flowers."
And the grateful fairy promised,
"Very soon I shall repay you."

That same evening, turning homeward,

Keewis heard a voice cry, "Danger!
Look above you!" Glancing upwards

Keewis saw a panther crouching
On a limb that crossed his pathway.

Swift the panther sprang, but swifter
Flew the fearless hunter's arrow—

Pierced its heart and laid it lifeless.
And he heard a voice that whispered,
"I have kept my promise, Keewis,
Not too small was I to help you!"

'Twas the little forest fairy

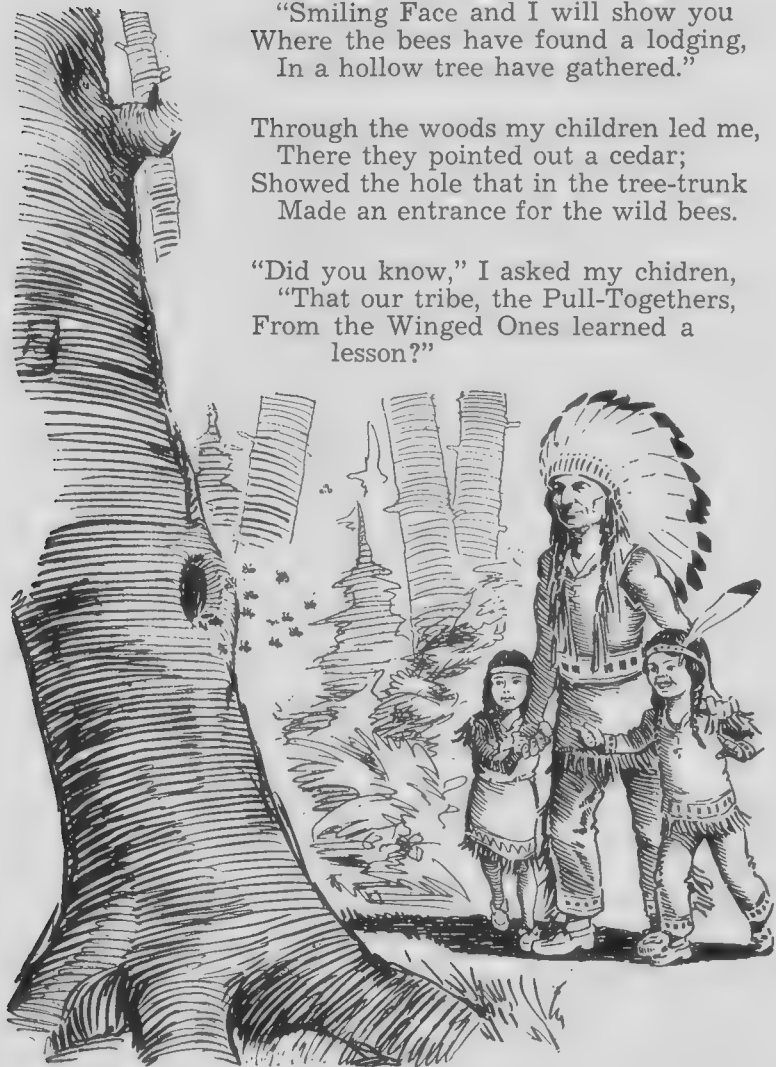
That had warned him, that had saved him.
From this story learn a lesson

We should always help each other.

"Come with us," said Little Rabbit,
"Smiling Face and I will show you
Where the bees have found a lodging,
In a hollow tree have gathered."

Through the woods my children led me,
There they pointed out a cedar;
Showed the hole that in the tree-trunk
Made an entrance for the wild bees.

"Did you know," I asked my children,
"That our tribe, the Pull-Togethers,
From the Winged Ones learned a
lesson?"





Then I told them how the wild bees
Choose a place to store their honey.

Building, working all together,
Never tiring of their labors.

Told them of the guards they stationed
At the entrance to their bee-hive.

Every bee, with honey laden,
By these guardians are halted.

First must satisfy the keepers,
Otherwise they may not enter.

Thus it is, I told my children,

Smiling Face and Little Rabbit,
That the hive is built and prospers

By the bees' unceasing labors,
Working busily together.

Long ago, the Pull-Togethers

Learned this lesson from the Winged Ones;
That is why we live contented

Working for the common welfare.

Listen to a tale recounted

By my kind old nurse Wen-o-nah
In my far-off days of childhood.

Long ago, Wen-o-nah told me,

There was warfare without ceasing,
'Twixt the timber wolves and bison.

Though the bison were the stronger
Yet the wolves were easy victors;

For they kept in packs together
While the bison wandered singly.

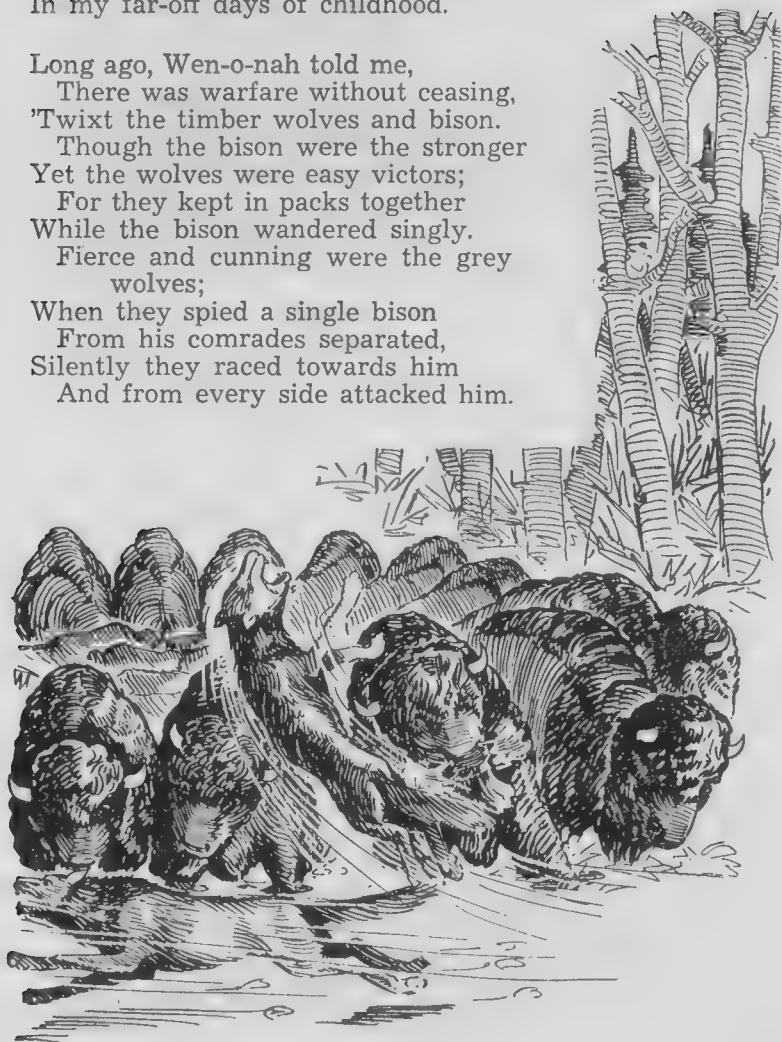
Fierce and cunning were the grey
wolves;

When they spied a single bison

From his comrades separated,

Silently they raced towards him

And from every side attacked him.



The Bison

As he charged the wolves that faced him

They would scatter, but behind him
There would come a deadly onslaught—

Cruel fangs would snap his tendons.

Helpless, he would falter, stumble—

Weakened, fall an easy victim

To the cunning of the wolf-pack.

So, at last, they learned their lesson;

They, to win, must band together.

Now, when through the snow-clad forests,

Howling sweeps the gaunt, grey wolf-pack

Swift the bison form a circle,

In the centre place the young ones,

While around them stand the strongest,

Shaggy shoulder touching shoulder.

Never yet the wolves have broken

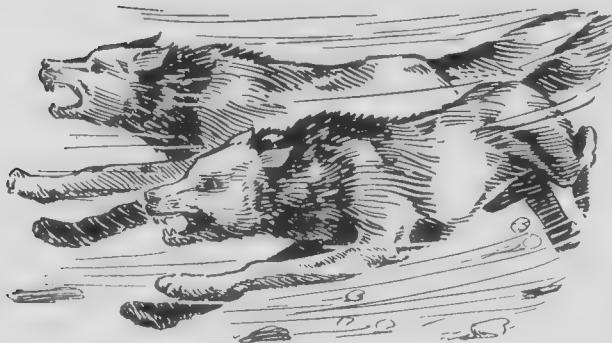
Through that circle of protection.

Those who, hunger-maddened, try it

Are hurled backwards, dead or dying.

"Ever since," Wen-o-nah told me,

"Have the bison kept together."



The Wampum Belt

See the gift I bring unto you
 Children of the Paleface nations.
 'Tis a wampum belt, a token
 From my tribe the Pull-Togethers
 And your friend, Chief Meri-ka-chak.
 It shall be a sign amongst you—
 Let it be a bond between you.
 When you see another wear it
 You shall know him as a comrade.

For this wampum bears a message
 From the Shan-a-macs, my people.
 This the message: Work together;
 Help each other, Paleface children,
 As the beavers work together,
 As the wild geese help each other.

I would see you band together,
 Form a lodge with your companions,
 Those who wear the belt of wampum.
 I would have you meet in Council
 Once a week hold secret meetings.
 In my tribe the Pull-Togethers
 Every week we hold a meeting—
 One, at which the braves are gathered;
 On another night, their sisters.

In our Lodge we hold a pow-wow—
 Only those can be admitted
 Who can show the belt of wampum —
 Wolverine and Flying Eagle
 Guard the entrance to the wigwam;
 They must watch that no one enters
 Save those braves who know the pass-word
 And can give the secret hand-grip.

In like manner, I would have you
 Form a lodge, as we have formed one.

Paleface children, I have spoken!



The Message of Meri-ka-chak is brought to you through Co-operative organizations who believe in it, and who are Pulling Together to pass it on to all men.

Would you like to hear more from the Great Chief Meri-ka-chak and about his wonderful tribe, the Shan-a-macs?

Write to the publisher.



